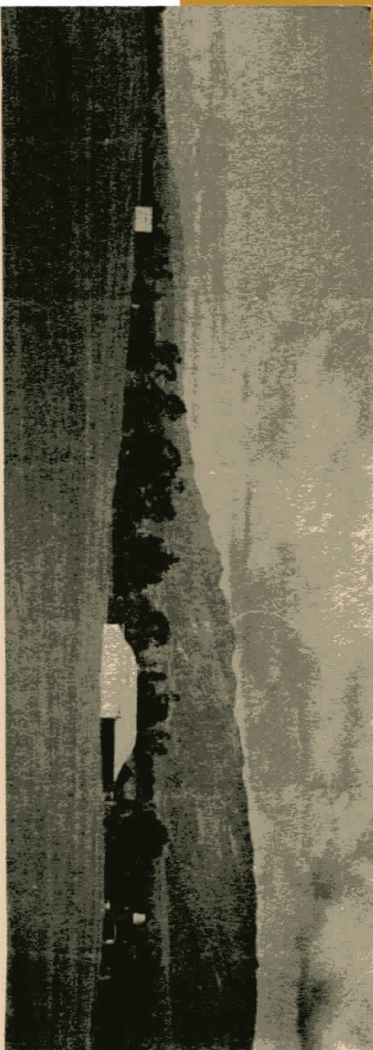




OVINGTON'S CASA LOMA air strip as it appeared in 1930.

The SAMARKAND

By Walker A. Tompkins

Samarkand meant "the land of heart's desire" in the archaic Persian tongue. It identified the fabulous Asian city where a mythical Queen Scheherazade spent her 1001 Arabian nights. In Santa Barbara, the melodic oriental name was first applied in 1920 to a deluxe Persian style hotel, formerly a boy's school.

As the dominating landmark of a hilly, elevated neighborhood, the Samarkand gave its name to an area bounded on the east by Oak Park, on the north by Hollister Avenue (now De la Vina Street), on the west by a ranch boundary fence centered on modern Las Positas Road, and on the south by the old Coast Highway and the railroad.

During the 19th Century the Samarkand Hills were open cattle range. By 1910 they were co-owned by Harry A. Hollister, son of the famous pioneer Col. W. W. Hollister, and rancher A. C. Greenwell. The area was first subdivided in 1920 as the Casa Loma Tract. Many of its street names carry a Hollister flavor: Peregrina, Alegria, San Onofre and Santa Anita Roads were named for arroyos on the old Hollister (Nuestra Senora del Refugio) Ranch west of Gaviota; Stanley Drive memorializes Hollister's youngest son, one of Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders. Tallant Road commemorates Ed Tallant, long-time manager of the Hollister Estate Company. Clinton Terrace was named for Clinton B. Hale, Hollister's son-in-law. The road entering from the south, Treasure Drive, reportedly got its name from a legend of two highway robbers burying a saddlebag full of gold alongside that road. They killed each other in a saloon brawl in Ventura before they could return and divide their loot, which presumably is still there awaiting a finder.

The Casa Loma, or Hill House Tract got its name from the first private dwelling to go up on the Samarkand Hills, at 3030 Samarkand Drive. It was the home of Earle Ovington, noted as the first unofficial air mail pilot in the United States, who came to Santa Barbara in 1919

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and established the Casa Loma Air Field with a 1,500 foot run roughly paralleling today's McCaw Avenue overlooking La Plaza. Although the "airport" offered no lights, hangars, repair loading facilities — just a mowed hayfield and a windsock flying a small barn where Ovington kept his own aircraft — the Casa Loma was Santa Barbara's only government-listed air strip at the time, attracted such aviation celebrities as Charles Lindbergh (flying replica, not his original Spirit of St. Louis), Jimmy Doolittle the first Tokyo raider, Amelia Earhart, Hap Arnold, and others. The pilot landing strip can be approximately located today as the elevated fairway of the Community Golf Course.

The modern history of the Samarkand neighborhood dates 1915 when Dr. Prynce Hopkins, headmaster of a private boys' school known as "Boyland" on Mission Ridge Road, purchased the 32 tract bounded by Las Positas Road, Hollister Avenue, Oak Park Tallant Road. At what is now 2663 Tallant Road, Dr. Hopkins erected his new and elaborate Boyland II, a two-story main building with two wings housing dormitories and class rooms, nine streets which now serve as garages, and formal gardens with a Persian style which rivaled, on a small scale, the famous gardens of Rome, London and Vienna. The garden terraces with their exotic plantings led down to an artificial lake of one and a half acres, in the form of a 200 by foot ellipse enclosed by a 1,000 foot cinder racetrack. The lake unique in that it had a sculptured relief map of the world, with the million-gallon, 28-inch-deep pond representing the oceans. There were miniscule snow-covered mountain ranges, rivers with running water, and tiny volcanoes which, on occasion, fumed real smoke.



PERSONALITIES FROM THE PAST

Dr. Prynce Hopkins (left) built the Samarkand Hotel complex; Mrs. Alma Spence (right) tried to give it away; Earle Ovington owned and operated the pioneer airfield.